

Colonel Robert Henry Short House
1448 Fourth Street at Prytania Street
New Orleans
Orleans Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1112

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

COLONEL ROBERT HENRY SHORT HOUSE

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Address: 1448 Fourth Street at Prytania Street, New Orleans,
Orleans Parish, Louisiana.

Present Owner
and Occupant: Mr. Alfred J. Moran.

Present Use: Residence.

Statement of
Significance: Started in the prosperous years just before the
Civil War and finished immediately after, the
Colonel Short House is a fine example of a Garden
District home that generally has been well main-
tained and is well known because of the cast-iron
cornstalk fence.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners:
Original owner--Colonel Robert Henry Short--1866 until
death in 1872.
Sold by Colonel Short's succession in 1872 to Miss
Mary E. Morgan.
In 1906 Abraham Brittin acquired the property from
Miss Morgan.
Mrs. Celeste Brittin O'Donnell (date of succession
not determined).
At Mrs. O'Donnell's death her heirs subdivided the
property. The garden facing Fourth Street was bought
by Alfred Moran in 1949. The house itself was pur-
chased by Miss Emilie Durand, who sold it to the
present owner, Alfred J. Moran (the son of the purchaser
of the garden site) in 1950.
2. Date of erection: June 1859 to 1866.
3. Architect: Henry Howard.
4. Builder, suppliers: Colonel Short contracted with
Robert Huyghe to construct this house on June 3, 1859.
R. Huyghe "was not one of the major builders of the day
and seems to have done only a comparatively small amount
of work. He was a native of Baltimore, Ind. [sic:
S. Wilson's MS indicates Maryland], where he was born in
1813. In 1857 he had built two frame houses at the south-
east corner of Magazine and Philip sts. for Sophronius
Twichell, for which Henry Howard was also the architect.

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"It was perhaps as a result of this work that he was selected to build Mr. Short's villa. Huyghe died in 1877 and is buried in the nearby Lafayette cemetery." (Samuel Wilson, Jr. See Sources of Information below, for specific reference).

5. Notes on original plan and construction of building:

"In the plan of the house, Howard followed in some measure the arrangement he had so successfully used at Belle Grove, John Andrews' residence at Bayou Goula which he had completed shortly before. In the interior the influence of the Greek revival which had been dominant for many years, is almost entirely abandoned. Only in the treatment of the entrance doorway with its classic pilasters and entablature is this older form recalled.

"The plan of the house being unsymmetrical, the entrance is located to one side of the facade. Across the front is a rich cast iron gallery extending through the two stories of the house. The gallery supports on the first story are in the form of slender double cast iron columns, while on the second story the more usual ornamented iron pilasters are used.

"Above the gallery roof a moulded stucco cornice supported on console-like brackets completely surrounds the main body of the house. The entire house is of stuccoed brick and was formerly painted a dark red-brown, the ironwork being painted the same color. . . .
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"All the principal rooms had fine decorated plaster cornices and center pieces in the ceilings. The door casings were all in the Greek manner with elegantly carved wood ornaments to enrich them. The mantles were mostly of white marble and rather ornately carved." (Samuel Wilson, Jr. See Sources of Information below, for specific reference).

The house originally cost \$23,750.00

6. Notes on known alterations and additions:

"The entrance hall extends through the house to a cross hall at the rear of the double parlors. This cross hall contains the stairway which is not however the original one, but one which appears to have been added about 1900 when certain other alterations were made.
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"At the Prytania st. end [of the dining room] is a delicate semicircular bay, a product of the 1900 alterations. At the garden end is an arcaded conservatory with stained glass which overlooks a broad terrace and gives to this area of the house a bit of the Newport character so much admired at the turn of the century."

.....
"The principle object of whoever was responsible for them [the changes made c. 1900] was to change the character of the interior as far as possible and transform it to the taste of their own day. Although the exterior had shown few traces of the Greek Revival, the strong influence of the later phases of that style was everywhere apparent on the interior."
.....

"Some of these [mantels] were removed and replaced by dark, heavily carved walnut ones, and the appearance of the rooms changed by the use of dark paint, in which the Greek revival details were lost, and by the application of panel mouldings to the walls.

"The rear parlor was painted a rich red with dark woodwork and even a red ceiling. Most of the original character has been restored to the old house merely by the use of paint, the replacement of some mantles and the removal of the wall panel mouldings." (Samuel Wilson, Jr. See Sources of Information below, for specific reference).

The two columns of the archway between the two parlors were removed at an undetermined date (see HABS photograph.)

The present owner (sometime between 1950-53) undertook a "restoration" which included:

- a. old dark red-brown paint which covered the exterior stuccoed walls, sandblasted off.
- b. stucco painted a light gray.
- c. ironwork painted gray-green.
- d. shutters painted dark green.
- e. exterior wood trim and entrance door casing painted white.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Structure:

No events of great historic significance appear to have occurred in this handsome structure. Colonel Short, who

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was said to have been originally from Kentucky, was known as the "Blue Grass Colonel." He was a commission merchant.

C. Sources of Information

Unpublished sources: Building Contract recorded June 3, 1859, with J. F. Coffey, N.P.; Notarial Archives, Civic Center, Loyola Street, New Orleans.

Published sources: Jewell, Edwin. Crescent City Illustrated. New Orleans: Edwin Jewell, 1873.

Samuel, Martha Ann and Ray. The Great Days of the Garden District (brochure). New Orleans: Parents' League of the Louise S. McGehee School, 1961.

Wilson, Samuel, Jr. "N.O. Houses: 'Cornstalk Fence' Home Designed in '59" (29th article in series on New Orleans buildings), The States (New Orleans), September 12, 1953. p. 26.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural interest and merit: One of the important mid-nineteenth-century houses of the Garden District, the Colonel Short House was designed by the New Orleans architect, Henry Howard, who was able to develop a home that was both suitable for the climate and stylistically a fashionable innovation.
2. Condition of fabric: The house has been well maintained. The interior has been extensively altered.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Number of stories and bays, layout: Two stories, three-bay front, rectangular main block with side and rear wings.
2. Wall construction: Stuccoed brick painted gray (formerly painted dark red-brown).
3. Porches: An ornate, three-bay, two-level, cast-iron gallery is at the front of the house. The first level has slender, double, cast-iron columns; the second has the more usual ornamented, cast-iron "pilasters." All ironwork is painted gray-green. Formerly the ironwork was a dark red-brown. The rear parlor has a curved bay on the garden side of the house. This bay has a fine, two-story, cast-iron gallery, which follows the wall's curvature. Behind this is a one-story "conservatory"

and terrace. These lead to the long dining room, which extends the width of the house to Prytania Street. (The dining room culminates in a small semicircular bay which was added in the 1900 renovations.) A smaller, one-storied, curved, cast-iron gallery similar to the garden side gallery is located in a similar position on the Prytania Street side.

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4. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The double main entry doors each have one large glazed panel with protective and decorative iron grillwork on the exterior. The rectangular transom overhead also has one, large, glazed panel with similar iron grillwork. This door is recessed in an elaborate Greek Revival frontispiece that consists of attached square columns and a fully developed entablature. The approach to the entry and porch is by means of five marble steps with six cheek pieces that carry four, large, stone urns with relief swags and small lion heads.
- b. Windows and shutters: The main windows of the first floor have one-over-one-light, double-hung, wooden sash and extend to the floor; these have square heads. The windows of the second floor have depressed, arched heads with simple moldings. Generally these, too, have one-over-one light, wooden sash. All windows have exterior, louvered, wooden shutters.

5. Roof:

- a. Shape: Flat
- b. Cornice: A molded stucco cornice is supported on console-like brackets. A low, five-part parapet crowns the cornice of the front facade.

C. Description of Interior

1. The house has a modified side-hall plan with side and rear wings. "The usual double parlors are found to the left of the entrance hall, but in this instance they are not identical rooms. The rear one extends farther into the garden in a curved bay with an ironwork gallery outside. Giving an idea of the magnificent scale of the house are the approximate dimensions of the parlors, which at their greatest points measure 43 by 26 feet. The ceilings are 16 feet high.

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"Across from the back parlor is a library which extends out in a similar manner on the Prytania Street side. The wide entrance hall is met at the rear of the parlors and library by a large cross hall which contains the stairway. This is of oak, evidently not the original since that kind of wood was not used for buildings in this locality at that period." (Martha and Ray Samuels. The Great Days of the Garden District. New Orleans: Parents' League of the Louise S. McGehee School, 1961. pp. 38-39.)

Behind the dining room, which extends the width of the house, are the kitchen, pantry, and other service areas. The bedrooms are on the second floor. Since the roof is flat, there are no attic rooms.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The Colonel Short House is situated on an urban corner lot and faces Fourth Street. The front facade is oriented toward the northeast.
2. Landscaping and walks, enclosures: The "cornstalk" cast-iron fence, which is at the Fourth Street and Prytania Street brick sidewalk line, had fallen into disrepair by the time the present owner bought the property in 1950. The rear section of the Prytania Street fence was removed to repair the Fourth Street fence. A solid brick garden wall was substituted for the removed section. At the time these repairs were made, the bases of the fence posts were exposed and the name of the foundry in which the fence was cast was revealed--Wood and Miltenberger (the New Orleans agency for the noted Philadelphia foundry of Wood and Perot).

Prepared by John C. Poppeliers
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National Park Service
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